



Louisiana Black Bear

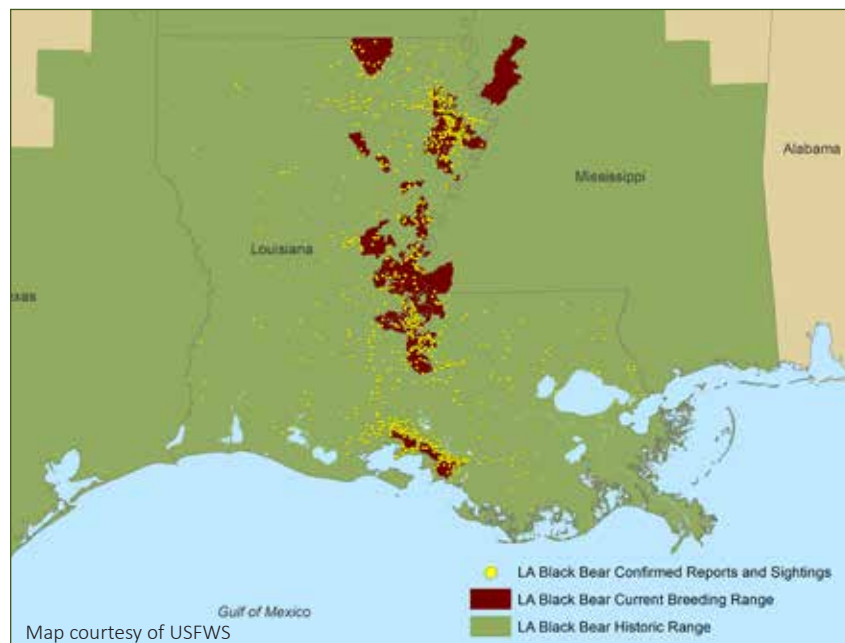
...Louisiana's State Mammal



The Louisiana black bear once ranged throughout Louisiana and parts of Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas. The black bear was common at the time of early colonization, serving as food for both Indians and European settlers. More than 80 percent of prime Louisiana black bear habitat in the Mississippi River floodplain had been lost by the early 1990s primarily due to clearing land for agriculture. Considerable work towards restoring the Louisiana black bear has occurred with multiple state and federal agencies, research universities, and non-governmental organizations playing integral roles in restoring population numbers and habitat of our state mammal.

Currently, Louisiana supports four core bear populations as well as several satellite populations in Louisiana and Mississippi. However, black bears, particularly dispersing males, can be found throughout Louisiana.

Based on the studies conducted by the University of Tennessee, the current Louisiana bear population is estimated to range between 500 to 750 individuals.



Map courtesy of USFWS



- Average weight of adult males generally ranges between 250-400 pounds; however adult males can weigh more than 500 pounds. Female bears are much smaller with an average weight of 120-200 pounds. Louisiana black bears can be up to 6 feet in length.
- Black bears are good swimmers and can also climb trees. They have a good sense of smell but have poor eyesight.
- Louisiana black bears are not true hibernators; they make day beds, but can remain active all winter.
- Female Louisiana black bears den either in trees or on ground nests made by the females. Cubs are born around the month of February.
- Bear activity revolves primarily around the search for food, water, cover, and mates. Bears are best described as opportunistic omnivorous feeders, as they eat almost anything that is available. Their diet varies seasonally and includes primarily succulent vegetation during spring, fruits and grains in summer, and hard mast (such as acorns and pecans) during fall.



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Louisiana Black Bears

The Cycle of the Seasons

Winter

When food is scarce, bears go into "winter sleep." They rest in a safe den for months without food or water. Every other year the female gives birth to one to three cubs while in her den.

Photo by Brian Lockhart, USDA Forest Service (forestryimages.org)



Photo by Elmer Verhasselt (forestryimages.org)



Cubs stay with their mothers for one and a half years learning how to survive. After their second winter together, cubs head out on their own.



Bears are excellent climbers and can climb on delicate branches to reach fruits and nuts. Nuts are an important fall food for bears. Acorns and other nuts provide fat that bears need to survive the winter.

Photo by Paul Wray, Iowa State University (forestryimages.org)

Fall

*Cycle of Seasons information courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Spring

By spring (April), cubs are active and beginning to learn about their world.

Insects, grasses and new growing leaves are important foods for bears in the spring.



photo by University of Georgia Plant Pathology Archive (forestryimages.org)



Cubs are small and helpless when born. They nurse, cling to their mother and grow during the winter months. They stay together in the den until April.

Bears can live to be as old as 20 years. A female could have up to eight litters in that time, but most bears don't live to such an old age.

Summer is the breeding season. Males travel long distances to find and compete for females.



Photo courtesy of USFWS



Photo courtesy of USFWS



Photo courtesy of Ohio State Weed Lab Archive (forestryimages.org)

Fruits and berries are the food of choice in the summer. They are high in sugar and energy.

Summer